

Brokeback River- A Rendezvous For R & R

By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB

A good way to promote health & wellness is to periodically set aside some time for a little rest and relaxation.

A friend of mine owns a family camp deep in the heart of Cook's Forest on the shores of the Clarion River in Pennsylvania.

Every year a bunch of us get together and go down there to do some work. It's called a "work weekend" mainly because we all have "worked" hard to get where we are in life and we feel we feel we deserve a "weekend" to get away.

It's a version "Brokeback Mountain" of sorts, only our gathering is strictly on the straight and narrow, if you know what I mean. It's not like the purpose of the rendezvous in the movie. Not that there's anything wrong with that!

In the past we actually worked on some projects. One year it was so brutally cold outside that we cut to size about twenty boards of lumber for an addition to one of the structures in the camp. And when we finished that task we called it a weekend.

Another time we cut down some trees for firewood. And two years ago we constructed a screened- in porch.

Most of the time we just play cards and watch the NCAA basketball tournament. Thrown in are frequent visits to an area watering hole- the Jefferson Inn- or "JI" as its known both near and far.

It was in that quaint establishment that my lungs and ears were challenged this year.

Being of sound mind and body, I usually refrain from going out on the Friday night I arrive. It's a three hour drive to the camp and, let's face it, after a full day's work I'm too mature (old) to go out until three or four in the morning imbibing like the others do.

I usually leave that to the younger ones (translation- everyone else) so that I can be fresh for whatever gruesome tasks face us the next day.

That is, until this year. I finally caved in to the prodding of the others and, at 10:00 PM, set out with eight companions to see what adventures we could experience- kind of like a Fellowship of the Ringers.

Our first stop was the JI. This establishment is as redneck a place as they come. I swear they have pictures of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan in the back room.

The bar itself has about twenty layers of varnish on a knot-filled surface. Small trees are horizontally attached to it to lean on when you sit at it.

The only thing missing from the atmosphere was Iron City Light. And the smoke was as thick as pea soup. There are no regulations banning smoking in Pennsylvania bars.

The bartender, a “lady” who had seen her days long before working at the JI, remained somewhat pleasant, as long as we kept on ordering the rounds. She went about her task of taking orders, and smashing the empty bottles whenever she cleared the bar.

There’s no deposit on containers in this territory of PA and so recycling is done on a volunteer basis. There’s nothing like hearing three or four bottles go crashing into a barrel every so often especially at midnight after you’ve had a few brews.

Most of the music in the “juke box” is pure country western. And they play it very LOUD. So, not only are the alveoli of your lungs abused by the smoke, your tympanic membranes (ear drums) are also worked over by the violence of recycling bottles and that country droning they call music.

The serving area is a large back room consisting of picnic tables & benches with twenty coats of that same varnish. The bowling machine that was there last year had been replaced with a table version of a curling game.

Curling is a sport practiced only in Canada, at the Winter Olympics and in women’s salons.

And of course there’s a large pool table in the bar area to test the unique skills of the locals. That became the focus of an incident that will be talked about around our campfire for years to come.

Let’s suffice it to say that my friend, a psychologist at a school district up north that will remain unidentified (it rhymes with Milton), and his partner were playing pool with a local couple. All of a sudden a mini brouhaha broke out.

At some point in their game a comment was made by some unknown bystander that was offensive to the local pool player and her husband. Well, all heck broke loose.

The husband and wife team came at us with pool cues leading their way. Their verbal assault directed at our group culminated in one member of our group being physically escorted out and the rest of them (I claimed to be an innocent bystander just taking notes) being asked to leave the premises.

Needless to say, we were all flabbergasted. But leave we did, and we sauntered on down the road to the only other watering hole in the area to complete our evening of frivolity.

My head hit the pillow at 2:45 in the morning. Unfortunately, I woke up at 7:00 AM. The others woke up around 10:00. So much for the “rest” part of the weekend for that night.

We did manage to trim a few windows and clean a small attic on Saturday. That left plenty of time to spend resting and recuperating in the manner previously described.

There’s nothing like a weekend of R & R to escape the stresses of everyday life. I recommend it highly to all. Just stay away from the JI. They’re very protective of their women folk there.

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